1553

A

DISCOURSE

ON

Ancient and Modern LEARNING.

By the late RIGHT HONOURABLE

JOSEPH ADDISON, *Esq*;

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A DISCOURSE ON Ancient and Modern LEARNING.

THE present Age seems to have a very true Taste of polite Learning, and perhaps takes the Beauties of an ancient Author, as much as 'tis possible for it at so great a Distance of Time. It may therefore be some Entertainment to us to consider

 what

re can be no doubt about the genuineness of this piece. The Internal marks
's Author are many and unequivocal; as must, I think, appear to any attentive reader
has any acquaintance with Mr Addison's style and manner. But, probably, it was
wn up in his younger days, and not retouched, or at least finished, by him. The reason
ht be that he had afterwards worked up the principal observations of this piece
his critical papers on Milton. H.

what Pleaſure the Cotemporaries and Country-men of our old Writers found in their Works, which we at preſent are not capable of; and whether at the ſame Time the Moderns mayn't have ſome Advantages peculiar to themſelves, and diſcover ſeveral Graces that ariſe merely from the Antiquity of an Author.

AND here the Firſt and moſt general Advantage, the Ancients had over us, was, that they knew all the ſecret Hiſtory of a Compoſure: What was the Occaſion of ſuch a Diſcourſe or Poem, whom ſuch a Sentence aim'd at, what Perſon lay diſguis'd in ſuch a Character: For by this Means they cou'd ſee their Author in a Variety of Lights, and receive ſeveral different Entertainments from the ſame Paſſage. We, on the Contrary, can only pleaſe ourſelves with the Wit or good Senſe of a Writer, as it ſtands ſtripp'd of all thoſe accidental Circumſtances that at firſt help'd to ſet it off: We have him but in a ſingle View, and only diſcover ſuch eſſential ſtanding Beauties as no Time or Years can poſſibly deface.

I DON'T

I DON'T queſtion but *Homer*, who in the Diverſity of his Characters has far excell'd all other Heroic Poets, had an Eye on ſome real Perſons who were then living, in moſt of 'em. The Deſcription of *Therſites* is ſo ſpiteful and particular, that I can't but think it one of his own, or his Country's Enemies in diſguiſe, as on the Contrary his *Neſtor* looks like the Figure of ſome ancient and venerable Patriot: An effeminate Fop perhaps of thoſe times lies hid in *Paris*, and a crafty Statesman in *Ulyſſes*: *Patroclus* may be a Compliment on a celebrated Friend, and *Agamemnon* the Deſcription of a Majeſtick Prince. *Ajax*, *Hector*, and *Achilles* are all of 'em valiant, but in ſo different a Manner as perhaps has characteriſed the different Kinds of Heroiſm that *Homer* had obſerved in ſome of his great Cotemporaries. Thus far we learn from the Poet's Life, that he endeavoured to gain Favour and Patronage by his Verſe; and 'tis very probable he thought ~~on~~ of this Method of ingratiating himſelf with particular Perſons, as he has made the Drift of the whole Poem a Compliment on his Country in general.

AND

AND to ſhew us, that this is not a bare Conjecture only, we are told in the Account that is left us of *Homer*, that he inſerted the very Names of ſome of his Cotemporaries. *Tychius* and *Mentor* in particular are very neatly celebrated in him. The Firſt of theſe was an honeſt Cobler, who had been very kind and ſerviceable to the Poet, and is therefore advanc'd in his Poem, to be *Ajax*'s Shield-maker. The other was a great Man in *Ithica*, who for his Patronage and Wiſdom has gain'd a very honourable Poſt in the *Odyſſes*, where he accompanies his great Country-man in his Travels, and gains ſuch a Reputation for his Prudence, that *Minerva* took his Shape upon her when ſhe made herſelf viſible. *Themius* was the Name of *Homer*'s School-maſter, but the Poet has certainly drawn his own Character under, when he ſets him forth as a Favourite of *Apollo*, that was deprived of his Sight and uſed to ſing the noble Exploits of the *Grecians*.

VIRGIL too may well be ſuppos'd to give ſeveral Hints in his Poem, which we are not able to take

take, and to have lain many bye Designs and Under-plots, which are too remote for us to look into distinctly at so great a Distance: But as for the Characters of such as liv'd in his own Time, I have not so much to say of him as *Homer*. He is indeed very barren in this Part of his Poem, and has but little varied the Manners of the principal Persons in it. His *Æneas* is a Compound of Valour and Piety, *Achates* calls himself his Friend, but takes no occasion of shewing himself so; *Mnesteus*, *Sergestus*, *Gyas*, and *Cloanthus* are all of 'em Men of the same Stamp and Character.

———*Fortemq; Gyan, fortemq; Cloanthum.*

BESIDES *Virgil* was so very nice and delicate a Writer, that probably he might not think his Compliment to *Augustus* so great, or so artfully conceal'd, if he had scatter'd his Praises more promiscuously and made his Court to others in the same Poem. Had he entertained any such Design *Agrippa* must in justice have challenged the second Place, and if *Agrippa*'s Representative had been admitted, *Æneas* wou'd have had very little to do; which wou'd not have re-

dounded much to the Honour of his Emperor. If therefore *Virgil* has ſhadow'd any great Perſons beſides *Auguſtus* in his Characters, they are to be found only in the meaner Actors of his Poem, among the Diſputers for a petty Victory in the fifth Book and perhaps in ſome few other Places. I ſhall only mention *Iopas* the Philoſophical Muſician at *Dido*'s Banquet, where I can't but fancy ſome celebrated Maſter complimented, for methinks the *Epithet Crinitus* is ſo wholly foreign to the Purpoſe, that it perfectly points at ſome particular Perſon; who perhaps (to purſue a wandring Gueſs) was one of the *Grecian* Performers, then in *Rome*, for beſides that they were the beſt Muſicians and Philoſophers, the Termination of the Name belongs to their Language, and the Epithet is the ſame [Καρηκομόωντες] that *Homer* gives to his Country-men in general.

Now that we may have a right Notion of the Pleaſure we have loſt on this Account, let us only conſider the different Entertainment we of the preſent Age meet with, in Mr. *Dryden*'s *Abſalom* and *Achitophel*, from what an *Engliſh* Reader will find a Hundred Years hence, when the Figures of the Per-

ſons

ſons concern'd are not ſo lively and freſh in the Minds of Poſterity. Nothing can be more delightful than to ſee two Characters facing each other all along and running parallel through the whole Piece, to compare Feature with Feature, to find out the nice Reſemblance in every Touch, and to ſee where the Copy fails and where it comes up to the Original. The Reader can't but be pleas'd to have an Acquaintance thus riſing by degrees in his Imagination, for whilſt the Mind is buſy in applying every Particular, and adjuſting the ſeveral Parts of the Deſcription, it is not a little delighted with its Diſcoveries and feels ſomething like the Satisfaction of an Author from his own Compoſure.

WHAT is here ſaid of *Homer* and *Virgil* holds very ſtrong in the ancient Satiriſts and Authors of Dialogues, but eſpecially of Comedies. What cou'd we have made of *Ariſtophanes*'s Clouds, had he not told us on whom the Ridicule turn'd; and we have good Reaſon to believe we ſhould have reliſh'd it more than we do, had we known the Deſign of each Character and the ſecret Intimations in every Line. Hiſtories themſelves often come down to us

defective

defective on this Account where the Writers are not full enough to give us a perfect Notion of Occurrences, for the Tradition, which at first was a Comment on the Story, is now quite loſt and the Writing only preſerv'd for the Information of Poſterity.

I MIGHT be very tedious on this Head, but I ſhall only mention another Author who, I believe, received no ſmall Advantage from this Conſideration, and that is *Theophraſtus* who probably has ſhown us ſeveral of his Cotemporaries in the Repreſentation of his Paſſions and Vices; for we may obſerve in moſt of his Characters ſomething foreign to his Subject, and ſome other Folly or Infirmity mixing itſelf with the principal Argument of his Diſcourſe. His Eye ſeems to have been ſo attentively fix'd on the Perſon in whom the Vanity reign'd, that other Circumſtances of his Behaviour beſides thoſe he was to deſcribe inſinuated themſelves unawares, and crept inſenſibly into the Character. It was hard for him to extract a ſingle Folly out of the whole Maſs without leaving a little Mixture in the Separation: So that his particular Vice appears ſomething diſcolour'd in the

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Deſcription, and his Diſcourſe, like a Glaſs ſet to catch the Image of any ſingle Object, gives us a lively Reſemblance of what we look for; but at the ſame Time returns a little ſhadowy Landskip of the Parts that lie about it.

AND, as the Ancients enjoyed no ſmall Privilege above us, in knowing the Perſons hinted at in ſeveral of their Authors; ſo they receiv'd a great Advantage, in ſeeing often the Pictures and Images that are frequently deſcribed in many of their Poets. When *Phidias* had carved out his *Jupiter*, and the Spectators ſtood aſtoniſh'd at ſo awful and majeſtic a Figure, he ſurprized them more, by telling them it was a Copy: And, to make his Words true, ſhew'd them the Original, in that magnificent Deſcription of *Jupiter*, towards the latter End of the firſt *Iliad*. The comparing both together probably diſcover'd ſecret Graces in each of 'em, and gave new Beauty to their Performances: Thus in *Virgil*'s firſt *Æneid*, where we ſee the Repreſentation of Rage bound up, and chain'd in the Temple of *Janus*:

——— Furor impius intus
Sæva sedens super arma, & centum vinctus ahenis
Post tergum nodis, fremit horridus ore cruento.

THO' we are much pleas'd with so wonderful a Description, how must the Pleasure double on those who cou'd compare the Poet and the Statuary together, and see which had put most Horrour and Distraction into his Figure. But we, who live in these lower Ages of the World, are such entire Strangers to this Kind of Diversion, that we often mistake the Description of a Picture for an Allegory, and don't so much as know when it is hinted at. *Juvenal* tells us, a Flatterer will not stick to compare a weak Pair of Shoulders to those of *Hercules*, when he lifts up *Antæus* from the Earth. Now what a forc'd, unnatural Similitude does this seem, amidst the deep Silence of Scholiasts and Commentators? But how full of Life and Humour, if we may suppose it alluded to some remarkable Statue of these two Champions, that perhaps stood in a publick Place of the City? There is now in *Rome* a very ancient Statue entangled in a Couple of Marble Serpents,

pents, and ſo exactly cut in *Laocoon*'s Poſture and Circumſtances, that we may be ſure *Virgil* drew after the Statuary, or the Statuary after *Virgil*: And if the Poet was the Copyer, we may be ſure it was no ſmall Pleaſure to a *Roman*, that cou'd ſee ſo celebrated an Image out-done in the Deſcription.

I MIGHT here expatiate largely on ſeveral Cuſtoms that are now forgotten, tho' often intimated by ancient Authors; and particularly, on many Expreſſions of their cotemporary Poets, which they had an Eye upon in their Reflections, tho' we at preſent know nothing of the Buſineſs. Thus *Ovid* begins the ſecond Book of his Elegies, with theſe two Lines:

Hæc quoque ſcribebam Pelignis natus aquoſis,
Ille ego nequitiæ Naſo poeta meæ.

HOW far theſe may prove the four Verſes prefix'd to *Virgil*'s *Æneid* genuine, I ſhall not pretend to determine: But I dare ſay *Ovid* in this Place hints at 'em if they are ſo, and I believe ev'ry Reader will agree that the Humour of theſe Lines wou'd be very much heightened by ſuch an Alluſion, if we

ſuppoſe

ſuppoſe a Love Adventure uſher'd in with an *Ille Ego*, and taking its Riſe from ſomething like a Preface to the *Æneid*. Gueſſes might be numberleſs on this Occaſion, and tho' ſometimes they may be grounded falſly, yet they often give a new Pleaſure to the Reader and throw in abundance of Light on the more intricate and obſcure Paſſages of an ancient Author.

BUT there is nothing we want more Direction in at preſent than the Writings of ſuch ancient Authors as abound with Humour, eſpecially where the Humour runs in a Kind of Cant and a particular Set of Phraſes. We may indeed in many Places, by the Help of a good Scholiaſt and Skill in the Cuſtoms and Language of a Country know that ſuch Phraſes are humorous and ſuch a Metaphor drawn from a ridiculous Cuſtom; but at the ſame Time the Ridicule flags, and the Mirth languiſhes to a Modern Reader, who is not ſo converſant and familiar with the Words and Ideas that lie before him; ſo that the Spirit of the Jeſt is quite pall'd and deaden'd, and "the Briskneſs of an Expreſſion loſt to an Ear" that is ſo little accuſtomed to it. This Want of diſ-

cerning

cerning between the comical and ſerious Stile of the Ancients, has run our modern Editors and Commentators into a ſenſeleſs Affectation of *Terence*'s and *Plautus*'s Phraſes, when they deſire to appear pure and claſſical in their Language: So that you often ſee the grave Pedant making a Buffoon of himſelf, where he leaſt deſigns it, and running into light and trifling Phraſes, where he wou'd fain appear ſolemn and judicious.

ANOTHER great Pleaſure the Ancients had beyond us, if we conſider 'em as the Poet's Countrymen, was, that they liv'd as it were upon the Spot, and within the Verge of the Poem; their Habitations lay among the Scenes of the *Æneid*; they cou'd find out their own Country in *Homer*, and had every Day perhaps in their Sight the Mountain or Field where ſuch an Adventure happen'd, or ſuch a Battle was fought. Many of 'em had often walk'd on the Banks of *Helicon*, or the Sides of *Parnaſſus*, and knew all the private Haunts and Retirements of the Muſes: So that they liv'd as it were on *Fairy Ground*, and convers'd in an enchanted Region, where every Thing they look'd upon

appear'd Romantic, and gave a thouſand pleaſing Hints to their Imaginations. To conſider *Virgil* only in this Reſpect: How muſt a *Roman* have been pleas'd, that was well acquainted with the Capes and Promontories, to ſee the Original of their Names as they ſtand derived from *Miſenus*, *Palinurus*, and *Cajeta*? That cou'd follow the Poet's Motions, and attend his Hero in all his Marches from Place to Place? That was very well acquainted with the Lake *Amſanctus*, where the Fury ſunk, and cou'd lead you to the Mouth of the Cave where *Æneas* took his Deſcent for Hell? Their being converſant with the Place, where the Poem was tranſacted, gave 'em a greater Reliſh than we can have at preſent of ſeveral Parts of it; as it affected their Imaginations more ſtrongly, and diffus'd through the whole Narration a greater Air of Truth. The Places ſtood as ſo many Marks and Teſtimonies to the Veracity of the Story that was told of 'em, and help'd the Reader to impoſe upon himſelf in the Credibility of the Relation. To conſider only that Paſſage in the 8th *Æneid*, where the Poet brings his Hero acquainted with *Evander*, and gives him a Proſpect of that Circuit of Ground, which was afterwards

wards cover'd with the Metropolis of the World. The Story of *Cacus*, which he there gives us at large, was probably raiſed on ſome old confus'd Tradition of the Place, and if ſo, was doubly entertaining to a *Roman*, when he ſaw it work'd up into ſo noble a Piece of Poetry, as it wou'd have pleas'd an *Engliſhman*, to have ſeen in Prince *Arthur* any of the old Traditions of *Guy* varied and beautified in an Epiſode, had the Chronology ſuffered the Author to have led his Hero into *Warwickſhire* on that Occaſion. The Map of the Place, which was afterwards the Seat of *Rome*, muſt have been wonderfully pleaſing to one that lived upon it afterwards, and ſaw all the Alterations that happen'd in ſuch a Compaſs of Ground: Two Paſſages in it are inimitably fine, which I ſhall here tranſcribe, and leave the Reader to judge what Impreſſions they made on the Imagination of a *Roman*, who had every Day before his Eyes the *Capitol* and the *Forum*.

Hinc ad Tarpeiam ſedem & Capitolia ducit
Aurea nunc, olim ſilveſtribus horrida dumis.
Jam tum Religio pavidos terrebat agreſtes
Dira loci, jam tum ſilvam ſaxumq; tremebant.

Hoc

Hoc nemus, hunc, inquit, frondoso vertice collem,
Quis Deus, incertum est, habitat Deus. Arcades ipsum
Credunt se vidisse Jovem : Cum sæpe nigrantem
Ægida concuteret dextrâ, nimbosq; cieret.

And afterwards, ———*ad tecta subibant*
Pauperis Evandri, passimq; armenta videbant
Romanoq; foro & lautis mugire carinis.

THERE is another engaging Circumstance that made *Virgil* and *Homer* more particularly charming to their own Country-men, than they can possibly appear to any of the Moderns; and this they took hold of by choosing their Heroes out of their own Nation : For by this Means they have humour'd and delighted the Vanity of a *Grecian* or *Roman* Reader, they have powerfully engaged him on the Heroe's Side, and made him, as it were, a Party in every Action; so that the Narration renders him more intent, the happy Events raise a greater Pleasure in him, the passionate Part more moves him, and in a Word the whole Poem comes more home, and touches him more nearly, than it would have done, had the Scene lain in another Country, and a Foreigner been the Subject of it. No doubt

but

but the Inhabitants of *Ithaca* preferr'd the *Odyſſes* to the *Iliad*, as the *Myrmidons*, on the contrary, were not a little proud of their *Achilles*. The Men of *Pylos* probably could repeat Word for Word the wiſe Sentences of *Neſtor*; and we may well ſuppoſe *Agamemnon*'s Country-men often pleas'd themſelves, with their Prince's Superiority in the *Greek* Confederacy. I believe therefore, no *Engliſhman* reads *Homer*, or *Virgil*, with ſuch an inward Triumph of Thought, and ſuch a Paſſion of Glory, as thoſe who ſaw in them the Exploits of their own Country-men or Anceſtors. And here by the Way, our *Milton* has been more univerſally engaging in the Choice of his Perſons, than any other Poet can poſſibly be. He has obliged all Mankind, and related the whole Species to the two chief Actors in his Poem. Nay, what is infinitely more conſiderable, we behold in him, not only our Anceſtors, but our Repreſentatives. We are really engaged in their Adventures, and have a perſonal Intereſt in their good, or ill Succeſs. We are not only their Off-ſpring, but Sharers in their Fortunes; and no leſs than our own eternal Happineſs, or Miſery, depends on their ſingle Conduct: So that ev'ry Reader will here find himſelf concern'd, and

have all his Attention and Solicitude rais'd, in every Turn and Circumſtance of the whole Poem.

If the Ancients took a greater Pleaſure in the Reading of their Poets than the Moderns can, their Pleaſure ſtill roſe higher in the Peruſal of their Orators; tho' this I muſt confeſs proceeded not ſo much from their Precedence to us in reſpect of Time, as Judgment. Every City among them ſwarm'd with Rhetoricians, and every *Senate-houſe* was almoſt filled with Orators; ſo that they were perfectly well vers'd in all the Rules of Rhetoric, and perhaps knew ſeveral Secrets in the Art that let 'em into ſuch Beauties of *Demoſthenes*, or *Cicero*, as are not yet diſcovered by a modern Reader. And this I take to have been the chief Reaſon of that wonderful Efficacy we find aſcrib'd to the ancient Oratory, from what we meet with in the preſent; for, in all Arts, every Man is moſt mov'd with the Perfection of 'em, as he underſtands 'em beſt. Now the Rulers of *Greece* and *Rome* had generally ſo well accompliſh'd themſelves in the politer Parts of Learning, that they had a high Reliſh of a noble Expreſſion, were tranſported with a well-turn'd Period,

and

and not a little pleas'd to ſee a Reaſon urged in its full Force. They knew how proper ſuch a Paſſage was to affect the Mind, and by admiring it, inſenſibly begot in themſelves ſuch a Motion as the Orator deſir'd. The Paſſion aroſe in 'em unawares, from their conſidering the Aptneſs of ſuch Words to raiſe it. Accordingly, we find the Force of *Tully's* Eloquence ſhew'd itſelf moſt on *Cæſar*, who probably underſtood it beſt; and *Cicero* himſelf was ſo affected with *Demoſthenes*, that 'tis no Wonder when he was ask'd, which he thought the beſt of his Orations, he ſhou'd reply, *The Longeſt*. But now the Generality of Mankind are ſo wholly ignorant of the Charms of Oratory, that *Tully* himſelf who guided the Lords of the whole Earth at his Pleaſure, were he now living, and a Speaker in a modern Aſſembly, wou'd not, with all that divine Pomp and Heat of Eloquence, be able to gain over one Man to his Party. The Vulgar indeed of every Age are equally mov'd by falſe Strains of Rhetoric, but they are not the Perſons I am here concern'd to account for.

THE laſt Circumſtance I ſhall mention, which gave

gave the Ancients a greater Pleasure in the Reading of their own Authors than we are capable of, is that Knowledge they had of the Sound and Harmony of their Language, which the Moderns have at present a very imperfect Notion of. We find, ev'n in Music, that different Nations have different Tastes of it, and those who most agree have some particular Manner and Graces proper to themselves, that are not so agreeable to a Foreigner: Whether or no it be that, as the Temper of the Climates varies, it causes an Alteration in the animal Spirits, and the Organs of Hearing; or as such Passions reign most in such a Country, so the Sounds are most pleasing that most affect those Passions; or that the Sounds, which the Ear has ever been most accustom'd to, insensibly conform the secret Texture of it to themselves, and wear in it such Passages as are best fitted for their own Reception; or in the last Place that our national Prejudice, and Narrowness of Mind, makes every thing appear odd to us that is new and uncommon: Whether any one, or all of these Reasons may be look'd upon as the Cause, we find by certain Experience, that what is tuneful in one Country, is harsh and ungrateful in another. And

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if this Conſideration holds in Muſical Sounds, it does much more in thoſe that are Articulate, becauſe there is a greater Variety of Syllables than of Notes, and the Ear is more accuſtom'd to Speech than Songs. But had we never ſo good an Ear, we have ſtill a fault'ring Tongue, and a Kind of Impediment in our Speech. Our Pronunciation is without doubt very widely different from that of the *Greeks* and *Romans*; and our Voices, in reſpect of theirs, are ſo out of Tune, that, ſhou'd an Ancient hear us, he wou'd think we were reading in another Tongue, and ſcarce be able to know his own Compoſure, by our Repetition of it. We may be ſure, therefore, whatever imaginary Notions we may frame to ourſelves, of the Harmony of an Author, they are very different from the Ideas which the Author himſelf had of his own Performance.

THUS we ſee how Time has quite worn out, or *decay'd ſeveral Beauties of our ancient Authors; but to make a little Amends for the Graces they have loſt, there are ſome few others which they have gather'd from their great Age and Antiquity

 in

* It is not exact to use the word decay actively.

in the World. And here we may first observe, how very few Passages in their Stile appear flat and low to a modern Reader, or carry in 'em a mean and vulgar Air of Expression; which certainly arises, in a great Measure, from the Death and Disuse of the Languages in which the Ancients compil'd their Works. Most of the Forms of Speech, made use of in common Conversation, are apt to sink the Dignity of a serious Stile, and to take off from the Solemnity of the Composition that admits them; nay, those very Phrases, that are in themselves highly proper and significant, and were at first perhaps study'd and elaborate Expressions, make but a poor Figure in Writing, after they are once adopted into common Discourse, and sound over familiar to an Ear that is every where accustomed to them. They are too much dishonour'd by common Use, and contract a Meanness, by passing so frequently through the Mouths of the Vulgar. For this Reason, we often meet with something of a Baseness in the Stiles of our best *English* Authors, which we can't be so sensible of in the *Latin* and *Greek* Writers; because

because their Language is dead, and no more us'd in our familiar Conversations; so that they have now laid aside all their natural Homelinesss and Simplicity, and appear to us in the Splendor and Formality of Strangers. We are not intimately enough acquainted with them, and never met with their Expressions but in Print, and that too on a serious Occasion; and therefore find nothing of that Levity or Meanness in the Ideas they give us, which as they might convey into their Minds, who used 'em as their Mother-Tongue. To consider the *Latin* Poets in this Light, *Ovid*, in his *Metamorphosis*, and *Lucan*, in several Parts of him, are not a little beholden to Antiquity, for the Privilege I have here mention'd, who wou'd appear but very plain Men without it; as we may the better find, if we take 'em out of their Numbers, and see how naturally they fall into low Prose. *Claudian* and *Statius*, on the Contrary, whilst they endeavour too much to deviate from common and vulgar Phrases, clog their Verse with unnecessary Epithets, and swell their Stile with forced unnatural Expressions, 'till they have blown it up into Bombast; so that their Sense has much ado to struggle through

their

their Words. *Virgil* and *Horace*, in his *Odes*, have run between these two Extremes, and made their Expressions very sublime, but at the same time very natural. This Consideration, therefore, least affects them, for, tho' you take their Verse to Pieces, and dispose of their Words as you please, you still find such glorious Metaphors, Figures, and Epithets, as give it too great a Majesty for Prose, and look something like the Ruin of a noble Pile, where you see broken Pillars, scatter'd Obelisks, maimed Statues, and a Magnificence in Confusion.

AND as we are not much offended with the low Idiotisms of a dead Language, so neither are we very sensible of any familiar Words that are used in it; as we may more particularly observe in the Names of Persons and Places. We find in our *English* Writers, how much the proper Name of one of our own Country-men "pulls down the Language that surrounds it," and familiariseth a whole Sentence. For our Ears are so often used to it, that we find something vulgar and common in the Sound and Cant; ~~but~~ and fancy the Pomp and Solemnity of Stile too much humbled and depress'd by

an instance of expression purely addisonian.

by it. For this Reaſon, the Authors of Poems and Romances, who are not tied up to any particular Set of proper Names, take the Liberty of inventing new ones, or at leaſt of chuſing ſuch as are not uſed in their own Country; and, by this Means, not a little maintain the Grandeur and Majeſty of their Language. Now the proper Names of a *Latin* or *Greek* Author have the ſame Effect upon us as thoſe of a Romance, becauſe we meet with 'em no where elſe but in Books. *Cato*, *Pompey*, and *Marcellus* ſound as great in our Ears, who have none of their Families among us, as *Agamemnon*, *Hector*, and *Achilles*; and therefore, tho' they might flatten an Oration of *Tully* to a *Roman* Reader, they have no ſuch Effect upon an *Engliſh* one. What I have here ſaid, may perhaps give us the Reaſon why *Virgil*, when he mentions the Anceſtors of three noble *Roman* Families, turns *Sergius*, *Memmius*, and *Cluentius*, which might have degraded his Verſe too much, into *Sergeſtus*, *Mneſtheus*, and *Cloanthus*, tho' the three firſt wou'd have been as high and ſonorous to us as the other.

BUT tho' the Poets cou'd make thus free with

the proper Names of Persons, and in that respect enjoy'd a Privilege beyond the Prose Writers; they lay both under an equal Obligation, as to the Names of Places: For there is no Poetical Geography, Rivers are the same in Prose and Verse; and the Towns and Countries of a Romance differ nothing from those of a true History. How oddly therefore must the Name of a paultry Village sound to those who were well acquainted with the Meanness of the Place; and yet how many such Names are to be met with in the Catalogues of *Homer* and *Virgil*? Many of their Words must therefore very much shock the Ear of a *Roman* or *Greek*, especially whilst the Poem was new; and appear as meanly to their own Country-men, as the Duke of *Buckingham*'s *Putney Pikes* and *Chelsea Curiaseers* do to an *Englishman*. But these their Catalogues have no such disadvantageous Sounds in 'em to the Ear of a Modern, who scarce ever hears of the Names out of the Poet, or knows any thing of the Places that belong to them. *London* may sound as well to a Foreigner, as *Troy* or *Rome*; and *Islington* perhaps better than *London* to them who have no distinct Ideas arising from the Names. I have here only mention'd the Names of

Men

Men and Places; but we may easily carry the Observation further, to those of several Plants, Animals, *&c.* Thus, where *Virgil* compares the Flight of *Mercury* to that of a *Water-Fowl*, *Servius* tells us, that he purposely omitted the Word *Mergus*, that he might not debase his Stile with it; which, tho' it might have offended the Niceness of a *Roman* Ear, wou'd have sounded more tolerably in ours. *Scaliger*, indeed, ridicules the old Scholiast for his Note; because, as he observes, the Word *Mergus* is used by the same Poet in his *Georgics*. But the Critic shou'd have consider'd that, in the *Georgics*, *Virgil* studied Description more than Majesty; and therefore might justly admit a low Word into that Poem, which wou'd have disgraced his *Æneid*; especially, when a God was to be join'd with it in the Comparison.

As Antiquity thus conceals what is low and vulgar in an Author, so does it draw a Kind of Veil over any Expression that is strain'd above Nature, and recedes too much from the familiar Forms of Speech. A violent *Grecism*, that wou'd startle a *Roman* at the Reading of it, sounds more natural to us, and is less distinguishable from other

Parts

Parts of the Stile. An obſolete, or a new Word that made a ſtrange Appearance at firſt to the Reader's Eye, is now incorporated into the Tongue, and grown of a Piece with the reſt of the Language. And as for any bold Expreſſions in a celebrated Ancient, we are ſo far from diſliking 'em, that moſt Readers ſingle out only ſuch Paſſages as are moſt daring to commend; and take it for granted, that the Stile is beautiful and elegant, where they find it hard and unnatural. Thus has Time mellowed the Works of Antiquity, by qualifying, if I may ſo ſay, the Strength and Rawneſs of their Colours, and caſting into Shades the Light that was at firſt too violent and glaring for the Eye to behold with Pleaſure.

FINIS.